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Psalm 146: World Hunger--the Way of Doxology

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Psalm 146

“World Hunger—The Way of Doxology”

Wayne Dockery

We are gathered this evening because we share a concern for hungry people in the world. I don't know who you are. Some of you may be people whose whole lives are directed toward rescuing people from suffering. I would expect there to be represented here some stories of personal heroism and sacrifice. But that is likely not the case for most of us. At least it is not the case with me.

I am deeply troubled by stories of hunger in the world, though I have never felt that hunger. And I would so like all suffering and pain to end. But I feel powerless as to how to help, really help. I am confused by talk of economic and political systems that are too complex for there to be any simple answers. I am humbled by my inability to make my own life reflect the values that I hold. In short, I am ill at ease in being here. I am no expert on the subject; I only care. The work of HOPE* and the Heifer Project and Bread for the World are among the benevolent efforts I appreciate and give my money to. But this seems so distant from me and small. Sometimes I wonder if it is even worth the effort.

I was tempted to speak tonight of statistics and techniques and technologies and projects and programs and policies and tips, things that we can do. I was tempted to cajole or confess or to ask of you confession. I was tempted to focus on our doing, to exhort us to increase our activity and sacrifice. But a psalm brought me up short and suggested another road to travel before the fact of hunger. The psalm embodies a path I feel a little unprepared to describe. Though to some of you it may not be strange, it is a way that I need reminding of. It is a way that focuses first not on human striving to make things better in the world, but upon the Lord to whom the world belongs.

If you would be patient with me for a moment, I would like to relate a little snippet from my life; it's the only way I know to gain access to the psalm.

At my home, we've planted a little rose garden—actually “garden” is a little pretentious. It's placed—by no intention of ours—where turning home from a long day it is what I first see. Just a little splash of color, reds and yellows and pinks and peaches. And then I'm in my driveway, dragging my briefcase and the rest of me into our house.

Once in a while after I pull my pick-up to a stop I round the tailgate and start toward my door but do not go there. I go and look at roses. If you knew me very well you might find that a bit incredible, but it is true. Sometimes I come near and touch the blooms and even smell them. A rose is something to marvel about. Such beauty. Some days my heart is raised up, lifted high from heaviness by the colors and lovely forms. There have been days when they have even provoked a prayer of thanks or two. A rose is something to marvel about.

The roses are from Tyler, that's where we lived 8 years before coming to Denton. There roses are an industry. They talk production, pruning technology, fertilizer techniques, yield per acre. They'd just as well be raising squash or barley. I'm quite sure many have forgotten why they ever started growing roses and what is the end of all their work.

There is a ritual once a year, though, that serves as a reminder, the Tyler Rose Show. Row upon row of clear vases filled with buds and full blooms — people come for miles to marvel. There is joy in just the seeing of them. It is the beauty of the rose for which all the work is done. But the growers do not make the beauty, the beauty is there in the rose already. It is the beauty itself that first provoked the toil. Because they excited wonder in us they are cultivated. That's

why they're grown, for the sheer enjoyment that is a rose.

I was tempted to speak tonight of statistics and techniques and technologies and projects and programs and tips. But then I read the

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lectionary passages for next Sunday and knew that would never do. For the psalm reminded me of the end of all this talk of hunger and the beginning of it too. All our efforts in this cause begin and end in God, in wonder before him. We marvel at him. We adore him. Our breath is taken away by the vision of our God:

Praise the Lord—who does not forget the poor.
 Praise the Lord—who does not abandon the helpless.
 Praise the Lord—who remembers prisoners hidden in dark places.
 Praise the Lord—who welcomes the stranger and watches over the alien.
 Praise the Lord—for whom calamity is not an occasion for turning his back.
 Praise the Lord—who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked and rescues the oppressed.
 For his mercy endures forever and his faithfulness is everlasting.
 Praise the Lord!

A rose is a thing of wonder. But it is easy to lose sight of the rose, while sweating in the field, battling insects, pruning. God is a God of wonder. And it is easy to lose sight of God. And this in our concern for world hunger, no less than any other concern. It begins to seem a human challenge. Something to prove myself in. Something to show how much better I am than another, more righteous. An arena for my mighty works and those of others, great projects — "look how we have gotten water from the rock!" And we take pride in our projects. Yet, there always comes a time when we examine them more closely. Then we despair at how little has been done. So again we buck up all our energy and lose ourselves in plowing round and round and mastering more persuasive information and better technologies and more effective fund raising techniques, and finally exhausted fall to the painlessness of forgetfulness, but even there our troubled spirits will not let us rest.

How many hearts once deeply pricked by the pain of world hunger now lie immobilized by the exhaustion of futility and by gnawing fears and guilt, tired of all the effort that has resulted in so little?

But there is another way. The way of the psalmist. The way of doxology. The way of praise. The psalm invites us to lose ourselves in wonder, love, and praise at the vision of God to admire the beauty of God who stoops to care for the widow to adore the faithfulness he shows to the helpless to be awed by his power to overturn the power of wickedness to be suddenly surprised at how quickly things are turned upside-down at the speaking of a word by him

to know the delight of how he watches for the orphan, all alone, and cares for the homeless in the streets, and lifts up people broken down by life, and champions the oppressed

We are invited to wonder at his beauty. We are invited to wonder at his beauty and take heart. We are invited to wonder at his beauty and take heart and rise to join him in his joyous work!

Will a rose forget how to be a rose? Will God forget how to be God? And by this vision of beauty and wonder and delight we are transformed and all our efforts are transformed. We are able to chuckle at our feeble efforts, at how seriously we take ourselves when we speak of "OUR EFFORTS TO END INTERNATIONAL HUNGER." But we are able, too, to chuckle with joy at the apparent foolishness of doing what seem futile tasks, for we know who God is and in praise of him find the certain faith that he will take up our meagre efforts and multiply them to his glory.

I am reminded of a time I wished to burn a garden plot in dry grass. It was almost still, a little breeze would wander in from time to time. I struck my match again and again and a little puff of wind would find its way into my hands and snuff the match. Finally I lit a tiny bit of grass at my feet and immediately it crackled and popped and spread as I jumped back amazed and then made a crazy stomping dance to put it out. It got quickly out of hand. Roaring in all directions. Across the field. Across the hill. You see its in the nature of dry grass to burn, even on a cold morning with stubborn matches. Bowing softly in the wind with what seems like fire

the furthest from its mind, it is in the nature of dry grass to burst to flame and roar across the fields.

And justice is in the nature of God. Dry grass will not forget to burn. A rose will not forget to bud and bloom. And God will not forget to be God: to clothe the naked and feed the hungry and stoop to the aid of the weak and fallen in the world.

And this of all things is the thing to marvel at. At God. And our hearts break into song. And our breath is taken away at his glory. And our hands join in the rhythm of his power in the world. Tirelessly the vision and the rhythm of our Lord sustains us in our efforts to rid the world of suffering until our dying. Let us arise and praise him:

Psalm 146

Leader: Praise the Lord.

People: Praise the Lord, O my soul.
I will praise the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

L: Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortal men, who cannot save.
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.

P: Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,
the maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—
the Lord who remains faithful forever.

L: He upholds the cause of the oppressed.	(people repeat)
L: He gives food to the hungry.	(people repeat)
L: The Lord sets the prisoners free.	(people repeat)
L: The Lord gives sight to the blind.	(people repeat)
L: The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.	(people repeat)
L: The Lord loves the righteous.	(people repeat)
L: The Lord watches over the alien.	(people repeat)
L: He sustains the fatherless and the widow.	(people repeat)
L: And he destroys the ways of the wicked.	(people repeat)

L: The Lord reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

P: Praise the Lord.